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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [EG](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: AT LAST -- EGYPTIAN COPTIC CHRISTIAN DEPARTS
KINGDOM FOR HOME IN CAIRO

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Gfoeller for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: After repeated attempts to leave Saudi Arabia, Egyptian Coptic Christian Dr. Mamdouh Full Fahmy flew home to Cairo on August 15. Fahmy claims that Egyptian Muslim co-workers harassed him from 2004-2006 and tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Islam. After his co-workers accused him of immoral behavior, he was detained by the mutawwa'in and police in 2005 and 2006. His Saudi sponsor intervened in 2005, but left Fahmy in jail in 2006 and ignored Fahmy's requests for his passport and exit visa. Eventually the Egyptian Embassy gave him a new passport without an exit visa. Some Egyptians claim that Saudi and Egyptian government officials intervened to facilitate Fahmy's flight. However, Fahmy said he used Riyadh's black market to purchase his exit visa. END SUMMARY.

BLACK MARKET AIDS FAHMY,S DEPARTURE

12. (S) Egyptian Coptic Christian Dr. Mamdouh Full Fahmy, a 42-year old surgeon from Cairo, left Saudi Arabia on August 15 after being denied his travel documents for over a year. According to Fahmy, he paid an Indian trader SAR 1,000 (USD 267) for an illegal exit visa. He then purchased a plane ticket and departed Riyadh on August 15. Fahmy told PolOff on August 18 that he was very happy to be home in Cairo, but said he and his brothers were worried that the Egyptian Ministry of Interior and police would knock on his door at any moment. He expressed delight at his entrepreneurial exit from Riyadh and denied that the Egyptian government or SAG had arranged for him to leave the Kingdom. He specifically referred to public statements by his lawyer, Dr. Nageeb Gibrael, head of the Coptic Egyptian Union for Human Rights, who had taken credit for Fahmy's return. In addition, Ahmed Al-Ansari, Third Secretary at the Egyptian Embassy in Riyadh, alleged to PolOff on August 18 that "the decision (to let Fahmy leave Saudi Arabia) was in Saudi hands." Despite his fear of the SAG's response, Fahmy noted that he is considering suing the SAG for SAR 5 million for lost wages and compensation for his suffering.

BACKGROUND

13. (C) Fahmy told PolOff on July 14 that his Egyptian Muslim co-workers at Riyadh,s Al-Bayan Polyclinic harassed him from 2004-2006 and tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Islam. After his co-workers accused him of immoral behavior, he was detained by the mutawwa'in and police in 2005 and 2006. As

the only Christian doctor, Fahmy claimed that his fellow Egyptian Muslim doctors began discussing his Christian faith on his first day at the clinic in February 2004. He said that the remarks were playful initially, but became more aggressive with time. Fahmy said the situation escalated in April 2005, after a Filipino nurse named Mary Jane converted from Catholicism to Islam. He claimed that she was enticed to convert by the approximately SAR 3,000 (USD 800) offered by a Filipino agent of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowment, Call, and Guidance. (NOTE: It is not uncommon for low-paid Christian laborers to be offered cash to convert to Islam. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) After Mary Jane's conversion, Fahmy said his co-workers asked him to follow her lead. Fahmy told Jeddah Congenoff in July that he was called into the room of one of his older coworkers, who was "very influential at work," to discuss Fahmy's conversion. When Fahmy said that he would rather not speak about religion, the man persisted and became upset, accusing Fahmy of being "a very dangerous man." Fahmy said he was arrested a few days later by mutawwa'in working for the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV).

FIRST ARREST

¶5. (C) Fahmy told Congenoff that two mutawwa'in and police officers approached him at work on April 12, 2005 and accused him of being drunk. He said that despite his request for either a urine or blood test to determine whether there was alcohol in his system, the police refused and told him, "No, you are drunk and you are a priest trying to convert Muslims." Fahmy was handcuffed and shackled, and then driven

to his residence where the officials removed his Bible, icon of Christ, and several Egyptian books. At the CPVPV station, the mutawwa'in produced two water bottles, claiming they were filled with alcohol and found in his residence. Fahmy denied that he was in possession of alcohol and refuted mutawwa'in claims that he was trying to convert Muslims to Christianity. He was then transferred to the nearby police station, where he remained in jail for five days.

¶6. (C) Fahmy later discovered that his fellow Egyptian doctors and nurses had signed a petition that accused him of being drunk at work, preaching Christianity, trying to watch female patients as they disrobed, and sexually harassing his female co-workers. His Saudi sponsor intervened and paid for his bail, apologizing for the co-workers' behavior and asking Fahmy to return to work that night. According to Fahmy, the sponsor treated him well and supported him in this incident because Fahmy's surgery practice was very lucrative for the clinic.

¶7. (C) Fahmy described the situation as tense, but said it was manageable for the remainder of 2005. After his contract ended in February 2006, Fahmy asked his sponsor repeatedly to return his passport with an exit visa, so he could return to Egypt. His sponsor said that "someone took his passport in 2005," so he asked Fahmy to be patient and continue working. Fahmy approached the Egyptian Consul between January-May 2006, but was unable to get his old passport back or a new one issued.

SECOND ARREST

¶8. (C) Fahmy had another encounter with his co-workers on May 24, 2006. Fahmy described to Jeddah Congenoff how two Egyptian doctors and one Egyptian accountant insulted him. He felt they were excluding him socially and treating him differently because of his faith. According to Fahmy, one of the individuals struck him and the others jumped him. After he fought with them, Fahmy "ran to the Emara (Governorate) for protection."

¶9. (S) The police jailed all four Egyptians that night. While Fahmy's co-workers were released the next day, Fahmy remained in jail for one week. Fahmy speculated that his sponsor, who provided a guarantee for the other men, was displeased with him because he had stopped performing surgeries in May. After Fahmy asked a Sudanese co-worker to take money from his apartment to pay a prison guard SAR 1,500 (USD 400), Fahmy was released the next day. He returned to work, but this time his sponsor told him to "relax" and stay at home while the public court case related to the fight was resolved.

GILDED CAGE?

¶10. (C) From May 30, 2006 until August 15, 2007, Fahmy was able to stay in his sponsor-provided apartment. However, he could not work, nor was he able to leave the country since he had no passport or exit visa. He began sleeping during the day and visiting Internet chatrooms at night to share his story. Fahmy told Jeddah Congenoff and PolOff that that he survived on financial donations from his family initially and later Coptic Christians began to send him money. After awareness of his situation was raised in the media and Internet, Fahmy also began to receive financial assistance from Westerners.

¶11. (C) During the summer of 2006, Fahmy went to court several times before a judge dropped the public case against him. Fahmy approached the Egyptian Consul again in January 2007 and was able to receive a new passport, but no exit visa. At the same time, Sayed Ahmed, one of the Egyptian accusers involved in the public case, requested private compensation from Fahmy. A judge ruled in June 2007 that Fahmy must receive 20 lashes for spitting at and insulting Ahmed. Fahmy appealed the decision in July 2007 and awaits the appellate court decision

FAHMY SEEKS HELP

¶12. (S) Egyptian Political Counselor Dr. Ahmed Bahaa El Din (strictly protect) confirmed to PolOff on July 23 that the

Egyptian Consul had tried to help Fahmy in 2006 with limited results. He added that Fahmy's case was "very sensitive" and the "U.S. should not interfere." El Din confided that the Egyptian Ambassador had requested during a private meeting in May Riyadh Governor Prince Salman's intervention to permit Fahmy to leave the country. In addition, he asserted that Egyptian and American Coptic groups were mobilizing significant funds and pressure on behalf of Fahmy and confirmed that Coptic groups were sending Fahmy money for his daily needs. El Din suggested that the main cause of Fahmy's problems was the "slow Saudi legal system." In addition, he said that there are "thousands" of Egyptian Muslims in prison for morality transgressions, such as being in seclusion with an unrelated woman, but only one Egyptian Christian (Fahmy) was facing difficulties. Therefore, El Din worried that any U.S. public statements or actions on behalf of Fahmy would jeopardize the Egyptian Muslims in prison, the private Egyptian-Saudi efforts to help Fahmy, and perhaps Egyptian Copts in general. El Din speculated that the Saudis, who "hate public criticism," would retaliate by ordering all Egyptian Copts to leave the Kingdom.

¶13. (C) Fahmy told PolOff on July 14 that he met with Human Rights Commission President Turki Al-Sudairy, who was sympathetic but unable to help. He also said that he had applied unsuccessfully for refugee status from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Fahmy asked PolOff on July 14 and August 13 for asylum in the U.S., citing his fear of persecution in Egypt. However, when Jeddah Congenoff specifically asked Fahmy in July whether he desired asylum or immigration to the United States, Fahmy,s

response was "No." He said he wanted to return to Egypt.

¶14. (C) Sultan Khilji, UNHCR Protection Officer, confirmed to PolOff on July 18 that he had rejected Fahmy's petition for refugee status, because it is "a labor issue." Khilji said Fahmy's case involved maltreatment by a sponsor, which does not fall under UNHCR's mandate. He added that Egypt is known for its protection of Copts, so "fear of persecution in the country of origin" does not apply in Fahmy's case.

¶15. (S) COMMENT: It appears that Fahmy faced considerable harassment and pressure to convert to Islam from his Egyptian co-workers. However, Christian media reports that Fahmy was "trapped by the Saudi government for his faith" are not accurate. In reality, Fahmy faced the troubles of many expatriates and even Saudis -- an unresponsive sponsor, protracted bureaucracy, and a glacially-paced legal system. Thanks to Riyadh's thriving black market, he was able to beat the system. It remains to be seen if and how the SAG and Egyptian government will respond to Fahmy's illegal exit. END COMMENT.
GFOELLER